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~~BACKSTABBERS~~

Probe's Accuser Of Thurmond Now Identified

The man who told a grand jury that he saw Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) take at least \$20,000 can now be named: William W. Pearce.

I had been asked to keep his name out of my previous reports, but my sources say they believe that his identity has now leaked back to the senator. Pearce swore to a Washington grand jury on Feb. 10 that he had witnessed the payment. Thurmond denied the allegation.

Five days later, under suspicious circumstances, a federal grand jury in Norfolk, Va., indicted Pearce on six counts of fraud.

As the Senate Judiciary chairman, Thurmond has considerable clout with the Justice Department. My sources thought it was a strange coincidence that Pearce should suddenly be indicted after testifying against the powerful Thurmond.

The indictment followed a long and bitter legal dispute between Pearce and his former employer, Honeywell Inc.—a dispute that Pearce thought had been settled months ago.

For years Pearce was a private detective in Washington; his exploits

were chronicled in a popular book. Pearce also served as a bailiff in the District of Columbia court system.

Lawyers in the Washington area used Pearce's services as a detective. In 1975, one of these attorneys lined him up with Edwin P. Wilson, who was then running a covert operation for the CIA and Navy intelligence.

Like just about everything involving Wilson, Pearce's story is complex. It was unraveled in a series of interviews with my associate Dale Van Atta. The substance of it:

Pearce acted as a bodyguard and security man for Wilson. Pearce also spied on other Wilson employees. As a cover for his espionage activities, Wilson set Pearce up in a lavish apartment with a woman. Wilson also provided him with two sets of identification papers.

Pearce was known around the Wilson office as Peter Wagner. But when he attended meetings that Wilson arranged with Israelis, he was identified as Dr. David Schwartz. And he had passports, driver's licenses and Social Security cards in both names.

Some of Pearce's assignments from Wilson were odd. He was instructed, for example, to secure specially prepared chickens for Wilson's Moslem clients.

Another time, Pearce arranged through Wilson to deliver 400 combat helmets to the Red Cross for use in disaster work. Afterward, he re-

ceived a worried call from a Red Cross official. Many of the helmets were dented and bloodstained, the official complained.

And once, Pearce was assigned to raid my office files. But, upon reflection, Wilson dropped the idea.

At the same time that Pearce was accepting assignments from Wilson, he was working full time as branch manager of Honeywell's protective services division in Norfolk. Though the Wilson contact helped him win customers for Honeywell, company officials did not know that their Norfolk manager was moonlighting for the ex-CIA agent.

The relationship between Wilson and Pearce soured in late 1979. Wilson's activities came under federal scrutiny, and he was indicted on charges of smuggling arms to Libya.

When a Wilson associate was arrested in the shooting of a Libyan dissident in Colorado, an apparent "hit list" containing Pearce's name was found on the suspect. This was reported in the newspapers.

Honeywell officials, apparently embarrassed at this public link between their branch manager and Wilson, fired Pearce in April 1981. He sued; they countersued.

The dispute was later settled—or so Pearce thought. But then, last December, Pearce told federal officials that on two occasions he saw a middleman deliver \$10,000 cash from Wilson to Thurmond.